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# Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands: concepts, developments, and backdrops

Sipco Vellenga

## ABSTRACT

In recent years, the Netherlands has been frequently confronted with public incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. After defining the complex concepts of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, presenting the theoretical approach to these phenomena, and sketching the societal context in which they are embedded, this article describes the development of the numbers of reported expressions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands since the turn of the century. It notes that the general level of annual numbers of recorded incidents of the phenomena has increased since 2000 and, at the same time, there are significant fluctuations in the numbers of notified incidents per year. These fluctuations correlate to outbursts of violence in the Middle East and to acts of violence committed in the name of Islam in the West, while the general higher level of incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia relates to numerous and various threats experienced in the context of the Dutch multi-ethnic society, changes in national identity, and trends in globalisation.

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## Introduction

In recent years, the Netherlands has been frequently confronted with public incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. In 2013, Turkish–Dutch youth declared without shame in a broadcast report that they had sympathy for Hitler because they, too, hated Jews (Onbevoegd gezag 2013). In the summer of 2014, there were chants of “Death to Israel, death to Jews” (NOS 2014) during pro-Gaza demonstrations. A recent research report revealed that a third of all Christian youth (34%) in the Netherlands and over a quarter of all non-believing youth (27%) do not think ‘so positively’ about Muslims, while one out of eight Muslim youth (12%) does not think ‘so positively’ about Jews (van Wonderen and Wagenaar 2015, 92). Alongside these indications of anti-Semitism there are many indications of Islamophobia. On 27 February 2016, for instance, five men hurled Molotov cocktails against the wall of a mosque in Enschede. The five perpetrators, right-wing extremists, were convicted of a terrorist offence (Nagtegaal 2016). A few weeks later, on 17 March 2016, a pig’s head was found outside the El Fath Mosque in Berkel en Rodenrijs, near Rotterdam. According to the *Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau* (SCP), the Netherlands Institute for Social Research,

two thirds of Muslims (65%) in the Netherlands experience discrimination (Andriessen, Fernee, and Wittebrood 2014, 77). Furthermore, the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (PVV—Party for Freedom) continues criticising Islam and Muslims tirelessly. This party considers Islam not to be a religion but a malevolent ideology and strives for a rigorous restriction of the freedom of belief for Muslims in the Netherlands: a ban on the Koran, a ban on Islamic head scarves at public functions, and the closing of all mosques and Islamic schools (PVV 2017).<sup>1</sup>

To correct an erroneous image, current anti-Semitism in the Netherlands is not limited to Muslims or Muslim youth and, similarly, Islamophobia is not restricted to less well educated people. Recent surveys, conducted by the Research Centre Panteia in 2013 and 2015, on the size, character, and backgrounds of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents in secondary education show that other categories are also involved. The surveys revealed that, in 2015, a large majority of teachers (61%) witnessed Islamophobic incidents in their classrooms, while more than one in three teachers (36%) observed expressions of anti-Semitism (Bouma and de Ruig 2015, 13; cf. Wolf, Berger, and de Ruig 2013, 13). Although pupils with Moroccan and Turkish backgrounds were over-represented among the perpetrators of anti-Semitic incidents, almost two out of three perpetrators (65%) had a native Dutch background (Wolf, Berger, and de Ruig 2013, 31). Despite the fact that Islamophobic incidents were, among all school types, found to be the highest in preparatory secondary vocational education (78%), just over half (51%) were noted in pre-university education (Bouma and de Ruig 2015, 20).

This article focuses on the question whether the numbers of (registered) incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands have increased since the beginning of the twenty-first century or, formulated more openly, whether developments have taken place with regard to the numbers of these incidents. In addition, the article focuses on the way these developments could be understood and the factors which have influenced them.

In order to answer these two questions, the subsequent structure is followed. Firstly, the complexity of the concepts of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia is addressed as well as the manner in which these terms are used in this article. Moreover, scholarly approaches to anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are expounded, that is, the perspectives of social identity, conflict, and mobilisation. Next, some features of the national and international context in which these phenomena are embedded are described, namely the development of a multi-ethnic and multicultural society in which religion counts as an important identity marker, the rise of a new national self-conception where the Netherlands is considered to be a progressive, predominantly secular society instead of a multicultural society, and the globalisation of regional conflicts. Subsequently, the development of the numbers of registered anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents in the Netherlands since 2000 is described. In addition, an explanation is provided for these developments from the perspective developed in the theoretical section and taken into the context in which these developments take place. The article concludes with a note on the possible dynamics between the development of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia.

## Concepts

The ‘classical’ definition of anti-Semitism is aversion to and prejudice against Jews as Jews (or because they are Jews) (cf. Feldman 2014, 5–8; Gans 2003, 1; Kushner 1989, 2–13). According to this characterisation, an attack on Jews, as Jews, is by definition anti-Semitic. Nevertheless, while this definition is attractive in its simplicity and clarity, there are some

problems associated with it (Klug 2013). One fundamental problem is that the term ‘Jews’ in the second part of the definition does actually not refer to ‘real’ Jews but to Jewish stereotypes, which is an elementary feature of anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is not based on experiences with real Jews but generally on caricatures and prejudice about them. Precisely for this reason, the British philosopher Brian Klug characterises anti-Semitism as

a form of hostility towards Jews as Jews, in which Jews are perceived as something other than they are... Thinking that Jews are really ‘Jews’ is precisely the core of anti-Semitism. (Klug 2003, 124–125; cf. Feldman 2013, 5–8; Klug 2013)

Consequently, anti-Semitism is defined in this article as *aversion to Jews based on negative stereotypes and prejudice against Jews*. Stereotypes are features which are considered to be characteristic of a collectivity, while prejudice is about global, negative feelings about the collectivity concerned (cf. Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 12–36). In Dutch culture, negative stereotypes about Jews are still present. The study *The Holocaust, Israel and ‘the Jew’* (Ensel and Gans 2017) shows that, in post-war Dutch society, old stereotypes of Jews, such as ‘the Christ Killer’, ‘the rich Jew’, and ‘the obscene Jew’, have been recycled and modified for new uses and, at the same time, new stereotypes have emerged which are attached to the Shoah or Holocaust and Israel. The new stereotypes often have a dualistic character:

the dual role of victim and perpetrator, victim of the Nazis and their collaborators during the Shoah, and perpetrator of injustices against the Palestinians in Israel and in Gaza and the West Bank (Ensel and Gans 2017, 49).

Islamophobia is, just like anti-Semitism, deeply rooted in European history (cf. Nielsen 2004). In their study on the perception of Islam in the Netherlands in the period 1848–2010, Marcel Poorthuis and Theo Salemink indicate that the current hostility towards Islam and Muslims is in line with a long tradition which is fuelled by several sources: negative reception of Islam by Christianity, the fight against the Saracens, Moors, and ‘Turks’, and racist theories developed in the age of colonialism (Poorthuis and Salemink 2011, 35–37). The term ‘Islamophobia’ has actually become more common due to the influence of the publication of the British think-tank The Runnymede Trust in 1997, entitled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All* (Runnymede Trust 1997). This study defines Islamophobia as “the dread, hatred and hostility towards Islam and Muslims perpetrated by a series of closed views that imply and attribute negative and derogatory stereotypes and beliefs to Muslims” (Runnymede Trust 1997, 7). While the term is now widely accepted and used, the manner in which it was espoused in this report has resulted in a long and heated debate (cf. Allen 2010; Cesari 2006; López 2011). Most of the criticism is related to the following four points:

1. the restriction of the definition of the phenomenon to the emotional component of hatred and aversion; 2. the difficulty in making a distinction between a prejudiced attitude towards Islam and Muslims on the one hand, and justified criticism of the religion on the other; 3. the observation that discrimination is directed at Muslims and not at Islam; 4. the Trust’s approach towards Islam is to treat it as an essentialised whole and Muslims as a homogenous group in the same way that Islamophobic rhetoric, against which it is aimed, does. (van der Valk 2015a, 12)

A possible alternative to the term ‘Islamophobia’ would be ‘anti-Islamism’. However, the major disadvantage of that term is that the current concept of Islamism refers increasingly only to political Islam, which implies that ‘anti-Islamism’ is not an useful alternative. There are other possible terms to mention: ‘anti-Muslimism’, ‘anti-Muslim feelings’, ‘anti-Muslim racism’, and ‘Muslim discrimination’. However, a significant drawback of all these alternatives is that they are much less accepted in science, politics, and civil society than the term

'Islamophobia'. For that practical reason, the term 'Islamophobia' is used, although I realise that it is a questionable concept. In line with the aforementioned characterisation of 'anti-Semitism', 'Islamophobia' is defined as *aversion to Muslims based on negative stereotypes and prejudice against Muslims*. Stereotypes which Ineke van der Valk examines in her study on contemporary manifestations of Islamophobia in the Netherlands are that Muslims are aggressive, unreliable, misogynist, and intolerant (van der Valk 2012, 118–119; cf. Esposito and Kalin 2011; de Koning 2016).

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are multi-dimensional concepts (cf. Cesari 2006; Julius 2012). A distinction could be made between religious, social, political, and economic dimensions. The religious dimension refers to religion-based hostility towards Jews or Muslims and the social dimension refers to expressions of hostility in the social domain (population groups, education, football stadiums or media). The political dimension encompasses political movements and parties focusing on marginalising the position of Jews or Muslims in society and restricting their rights, while the economic dimension refers to the discrimination of Muslims or Jews in, for instance, the labour market.

There are differences and commonalities in the current manifestations of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands. A striking difference between these phenomena is that Islamophobia is politically organised, in contrast to anti-Semitism. In the Dutch Parliament, the PVV presents itself explicitly as an anti-Islam party directed at 'de-islamising' Dutch society (PVV 2017). There is no comparable anti-Semitic party in Parliament. Furthermore, many Dutch Muslims feel they suffer discrimination regarding employment opportunities; one in three says s/he has felt this at least once in the past year (Andriessen, Fernee, and Wittebrood 2014, 77). To which degree Dutch Jews are confronted with this is unknown. In the wake of the lethal anti-Semitic attacks in Belgium and France in 2014, 2015, and 2016, Jewish buildings in the Netherlands received extra police protection. Recent research indicates that, during the last ten years, more than one in three (39%) of all mosques in the Netherlands have been targets of aggression, such as arson attempts, graffiti, vandalism, and threats (cf. van der Valk 2015a, 149).

## Scholarly Approaches

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are comparable social phenomena which can be fruitfully approached from the perspective of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1974; Brown 2000; Wimmer 2008; Baumann and Gingrich 2004). This theory approaches these phenomena as the outcome of processes of 'selfing' and 'othering'. It assumes that, in social life, people tend to make a distinction between 'us' and 'them' or, more definitively, between the collectivity or group they consider to belong to and the collectivity or group they regard not to belong to. This social categorisation assists individuals in creating a self-image and finding a place in life. Social identity is part of someone's self-image which derives from the knowledge of belonging to a group and the emotional value which is attached to this. People tend to attribute more positive qualifications to the in-group than to the out-group.

According to Social Identity Theory, the contrast between 'us' and 'them' will increase and people will be more inclined to stigmatise 'the other' and attach negative qualifications to the out-group if they feel threatened by that group (Riek, Mania, and Gaertner 2006; Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 37–73). Three types of (perceived) threats can be distinguished: *realistic threat*, *symbolic threat*, and *social threat*. The concept of realistic threat includes

socio-economic threat, but also the threat that people experience through vandalism, aggression, crime, and potential acts of terrorism. Symbolic threat is rooted in conflicting values and beliefs. The category of social threat encompasses threats to social position and group esteem (cf. Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 41–47). These three types of threat can all contribute to the development of negative stereotypes and prejudice against the out-group. In the case of Jews or Muslims, such a development results in anti-Semitism or Islamophobia. Research emphasises that emotions play a significant role in the rise of prejudice, especially fear and anger (Miller, Smith, and Mackie 2004). More factors, such as catalyst events, ideology, leadership figures, and context, have influence (Koomen and van der Pligt 2016, 12–36). Ideologies can justify stereotypes and prejudice and offer them a more solid basis (cf. Allen 2010, 160–185).

Social Identity Theory hardly pays attention to the impact of institutional actors and the context on these processes. It is the merit of the Resource Mobilisation Theory in drawing attention to the role of *institutions* in particular (McCarthy and Zald 1977; Edwards and McCarthy 2004). From this perspective, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic sentiments are not phenomena which arise spontaneously in society but are at least partly the product of agitation activities of anti-Semitic movements or anti-Islam groups, such as the PVV in the Netherlands. Their interests, strategies, and tactics can have a major impact. Moreover, these phenomena never appear in a social vacuum but in a specific *context*. Contextual actors can stimulate or slow down the upsurge of anti-Semitism or Islamophobia. Significant actors are political authorities and the media which not only report about news related to Jews and Muslims but also frame them positively, negatively or in a nuanced way (cf. EUMC 2002; Esposito and Kalin 2011).

### Context: three features

As stated above, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents always occur within a specific context and can thus only be understood in relation to that context. What characterises the current Dutch context? Three features, which are interconnected, appear to be of particular importance.

The first feature is the genesis of a *multi-ethnic and multicultural society* and especially the rise of *religion as an identity marker* for and of ethnic minorities in this society. The Netherlands has never been a homogeneously composed society, but due to immigration since the Second World War, ethnic and cultural diversity has increased. Particularly since the 1960s, considerable numbers of immigrants from Turkey and Morocco as well as from other parts of the world have come to the Netherlands, resulting in a multi-ethnic and multicultural society. Currently, the Dutch population represents over 200 nationalities. The number of Jews in the Netherlands is estimated to be 50,000—predominantly *halachic* Jews and what are often referred to as ‘father-Jews’<sup>2</sup>—and the number of Muslims is thought to be 900,000, which represents approximately 5.8% of the total Dutch population (Wallet and Berg 2010, 12; Maliepaard and Gijsberts 2012, 44–45). It is striking that, since the late 1980s, religion has increasingly become an identity marker for and of ethnic minorities in the Netherlands (Sengers and Sunier 2010). In particular, Dutch citizens who hail from Morocco and Turkey define themselves and are defined by others decreasingly in ethnic terms and increasingly in religious terms as Muslims (Peters and Vellenga 2007). A consequence of the ‘religionisation’ of the identity of these immigrant groups is that, in the expression of



aversion to them, the religious dimension has also become more important, with the result of an increase of Islamophobia.

The second feature is the transformation of the dominant Dutch *national self-image* and, related to that, the place Jews and Muslims take within the renewed national self-image. The term ‘national self-image’ refers to the prevailing images in the Netherlands of what Dutch society is and, more importantly, what Dutch society should be (cf. Anderson 2006; Lechner 2008; Vellenga 2015). Since the turn of the century and under the influence of the ‘Fortuyn revolt’,<sup>3</sup> the dominant national self-image of the Netherlands as a multicultural society has been transformed into the image of the Netherlands as a progressive, predominately secular society. The Netherlands is not considered any longer to be a multicultural society in which traditional and progressive identities exist side by side, but is now more defined as a progressive society in which values are dominant, such as individual freedom, freedom of speech, gender equality, equality between heterosexuals and homosexuals, equal relations between children and parents, and animal welfare. Moreover, the Netherlands is considered to be a predominately secular society, in which citizens have the right to express their religious identities in the public sphere, but in which this sphere is considered to be secular (cf. Houtman and Duyvendak 2009; van Dam and van Trigt 2015).

This shift in the national self-image has direct consequences for the positions of Jews and Muslims within Dutch society (Sengers and Sunier 2010). Within the concept of multiculturalism, all religious–ethnic minorities were included in Dutch society and considered to belong to it. Since the 1950s, the Jewish minority has held a specific position within this society. Because of the horrors Jews had experienced during the Second World War and the feelings of guilt that many Dutch felt about that, they were considered to be, in the words of the historian Bart Wallet, “the conscience of the nation” (Wallet 2014). However, with the transformation to a progressive and mainly secular society, a relatively new order has arisen in which especially traditional religious minorities are perceived to hold positions not in the centre but at the margins of Dutch society. In particular, Muslim communities are seen to propagate traditional values which are supposed to be incompatible with the dominant progressive values of Dutch culture and it is expected that they assimilate (Peters and Vellenga 2007; Houtman and Duyvendak 2009). Their position on the periphery is accompanied by experiences of deprivation and discrimination. Within the renewed order, Jews—in particular, secular and liberal Jews—hold a position in or near the centre of Dutch society, although Orthodox Jews noticed during the debate in the Dutch House of Representatives on unstunned ritual slaughter in 2011 that their position is not taken for granted any longer in Dutch society (Vellenga 2015; Wallet 2014).

The third feature that characterises the context of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents is the trend of *globalisation*, which can be described as “the expansion and intensification of social relations and consciousness across world-time and world-place” as important in the Netherlands (Steger 2009, 15). This trend has acquired a strong impetus during the last decades through the increase of immigration from non-Western countries, the growth of international mobility and tourism, the ongoing rise of the mass media, the ‘Internet revolution’, and the emergence of social media. One consequence of this development is a growing diversity in opinions within the Dutch population regarding international conflicts, such as the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, and in loyalties to the parties involved in these conflicts. A second consequence is that people are more rapidly and probably better informed about international conflicts which have high newsworthiness. Due to these



effects, foreign conflicts, such as the Middle East conflict, can far more easily result in an increase of tensions in the relations between groups which support Israel or the Palestinians, which, as will be demonstrated further in this article, contribute to the rise of Islamophobic and anti-Semitic incidents in the Netherlands (cf. Whine 2003; Esposito and Kalin 2011).

## Trends

The question of the increase of the numbers of expressions of (social) anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands since the turn of the century is not easy to answer accurately because the measurement of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic expressions is a very complex issue. Actually, there are no longitudinal measurements of these expressions, but only long-term measurements of notifications of these expressions. However, the notifications are influenced by more factors than just the expressions involved. The numbers of notifications are, for example, also influenced by the level of publicity the registration points enjoy among the wider public, opinions about the usefulness of reporting an incident or inaccurate registration by the (police) services, for example, by registering swastikas on mosques as anti-Semitic instead of Islamophobic expressions, as was the case before 2014 (cf. van der Valk 2017, 15).

A number of sources are available in the Netherlands which can cumulatively provide an indication of probably not so much the real numbers of expressions, but of at least the development of the numbers of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents over the last 15 years. A distinction can be made between sources concerning notifications of incidents on the Internet and sources concerning notifications of other types of incidents, such as ‘real life’ incidents (e.g. verbal threats, graffiti, arson), incidents in specific societal domains (e.g. offensive remarks in the media, derisive singing in football stadiums), and incidents related to work (e.g. discrimination in the labour market, bullying at work). Concerning the first category, the annual reports of *Meldpunt Discriminatie Internet* (MDI—Notification Point Discrimination Internet) are very useful and, concerning the second category, several sources offer useful information. With regard to anti-Semitism, the annual reports of the *Centrum Informatie en Documentatie Israel* (CIDI—Centre for Information and Documentation Israel) are relevant, as are several periodical research reports on racism and extremism in the Netherlands, published by Leiden University, the Anne Frank Foundation, and the Verwey–Jonker Institute.

Islamophobia is less well documented. However, some of the reports mentioned above on racism and extremism offer data regarding Islamophobia. In recent years, van der Valk has collated a lot of data from different individual sources about Islamophobia in four publications (van der Valk 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2017). Notwithstanding the lack of an established, longstanding notification point for the registration of Islamophobic incidents, as the CIDI is for anti-Semitic incidents, in recent years, there have been several Islamophobia notification points in the Netherlands, such as *Meldpunt tegen Islamofobie en Discriminatie* (Notification Point against Islamophobia and Discrimination, see [www.meldpunt-islamofobie.nl](http://www.meldpunt-islamofobie.nl), accessed 15 September 2017), Al Nisa (see [islamofobie@alnisa.nl](mailto:islamofobie@alnisa.nl), accessed 15 September 2017), and *Meldpunt islamofobie* (Notification Point Islamophobia, in particular on Facebook). These new initiatives differ in professionalism and it is not always clear how they use the term ‘Islamophobia’ (see <http://www.republiekallochtonie.nl/islamofobie-moslimhaat>, accessed 15 September 2017). In 2016, a joint report of police and anti-discrimination offices with data on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in 2014 and 2015 were issued (Politie 2015).

### Notifications of anti-Semitic incidents (except those on the Internet)

The oldest source is the CIDI which has published anti-Semitic cases since the early 1990s. The annual reports in the 1990s outline a modest annual increase in the number of incidents, with the exception of 1996 and 1998 when the number remained constant. These reports do not provide figures about the total number of incidents, in contrast to the annual reports since 2000.

**Table 1.** CIDI statistics on registered anti-Semitic incidents, 2000–2015.

2000	96	2004	336	2008	108	2012	96
2001	139	2005	159	2009	167	2013	100
2002	359	2006	261	2010	124	2014	171
2003	334	2007	104	2011	112	2015	126

Note: In its reports, the CIDI used to make a distinction between the following categories of anti-Semitism: real life incidents, incident in the immediate vicinity, written expressions, and societal domain, such as sports and demonstrations.

Source: <http://www.cidi.nl/sectie/anti-Semitisme/cidi-anti-Semitismemonitor/>, accessed 15 September 2017.

### Notifications of Islamophobic incidents (except those on the Internet)

The Annex of the sixth report of the monitor *Racisme en extremisme* (van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2004b, 3) shows that, in the month after the murder of Theo van Gogh, on 2 November 2004, 174 violent incidents were noted, including 104 anti-Muslim incidents and 47 attacks on mosques. The monitor *Derde rapportage racisme, anti-Semitisme en extreemrechts geweld in Nederland* mentions that, according to Dutch police records, in total, 150 incidents of Muslim discrimination were registered in 2013, which comprised 115 incidents of use of insulting language and 35 incidents of intentional discrimination

**Table 2.** Monitor Racism and Extremism statistics on registered anti-Semitic incidents, 1997–2013.

1997	9	2004	–	2009	18
1998	8	2005	41	2010	19 <sup>a</sup>
2001	18	2006	35	2011	30
2002	46	2007	21	2012	58
2003	39	2008	14	2013	61

<sup>a</sup>The figures concerning 2010–2013 have been taken from *Derde rapportage racisme, anti-Semitisme en extreemrechts geweld in Nederland* (Tierolf, Hermens, and Drost 2014). In this report, a distinction is made between anti-Semitic scolding and intentional anti-Semitism where the perpetrator is well aware of the Jewish identity of the victim. The reported figures concern the last category.

Source: van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2003, 27; van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2006, 80; van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2008, 35; Rodrigues and van Donselaar 2010, 31; Tierolf, Hermens, and Drost 2014, 33.

(Tierolf, Hermens, and Drost 2014, 48). Van der Valk's overview *Islamofobie en discriminatie* reveals that, in 2005, 2007, and 2008, the most violent acts against mosques were noted (van der Valk 2012, 78). A recent research project, conducted by *Stichting Platform Islamitische Organisaties Rijnmond* (SPIOR—Platform for Islamic Organisations in Rijnmond), shows that Islamophobia as perceived by Muslims in the region of Rotterdam is much more widespread than registered by the relevant authorities (SPIOR 2016).

**Table 3.** Monitor Racism and Extremism statistics on registered Islamophobic incidents, 2002–2009.

2002	68	2006	62
2003	59	2007	82
2004	–	2008	89
2005	70	2009	52

Source: van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2004a, 32; van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2006, 96; van Donselaar and Rodrigues 2008, 35; Rodrigues and van Donselaar 2010, 31.

### Notifications of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents on the Internet

What image do the data provide about the development of the numbers of notified incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands? In summary, firstly, the general level of the annual numbers of recorded expressions of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia is higher than that before 2000–2001. We thus observe *an increase* of these forms of out-group hostility. This observation is in line with both Michael Whine's statement that October 2000 proved to be a watershed with regard to anti-Semitic incidents in Britain (Whine 2003, 31) and with the observation by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) that

Islamic communities and other vulnerable groups have become a target of increased hostility since 11 September. A greater sense of fear among the general population has exacerbated already existing prejudices and fuelled acts of aggression and harassment in many European Member States. (EUMC 2002, 5)

Secondly, at the same time, there are considerable *fluctuations* in the numbers of notified incidents per year. Regarding anti-Semitism, the peak was in the period 2002–2004 and, regarding Islamophobia, in the period 2004–2008. Subsequently the numbers decreased. Therefore, an uninterrupted ascending curve is not observed, but a development with peaks and troughs. In 2014, the number of recorded expressions of anti-Semitism increased, while, in 2015, the number of registered incidents of Islamophobia rose exponentially.<sup>4</sup>

Thirdly, insofar as data about the perpetrators of the incidents are available, they show conclusively that both anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are *no* longer exclusively a matter of the 'radical right', which was the case in the 1990s, but are also manifest in other sections of the population. Islamophobia is further noticed among the constituency of populist nationalist parties and on an even broader scale, while anti-Semitism is rife in, among others, Turkish–Dutch and Moroccan–Dutch Islamic communities.<sup>5</sup>

**Table 4.** MDI statistics on registered anti-Semitic and Islamophobic incidents on the Internet, 1998–2015.

Year	Anti-Semitism	Islamophobia
1998	31	–
2000	203	–
2001	197	125
2002	584	291
2003	514	231
2004	610	409
2005	374	371
2006	463	473
2007	371	365
2008	344	346
2009	399	182
2010	414	276
2011	252	319
2012	285	196
2013	250	222
2014	328	219
2015	142	330

Source: <http://www.meldpunt.nl/site/page.php?lang=&pageID=34>, accessed 15 September 2017.

## Factors

How can we understand these developments? What factors have contributed to them? The focus hereinafter will be on the manifestations of these trends in the aforementioned ‘new’ categories or, to be more precise, on anti-Semitism in (a section of) Muslims and on Islamophobia in the constituency of Dutch populist nationalist parties since 2000. The factors described should be understood against the background of the theoretical approach and context which have already been sketched.

Following the Belgian sociologists Dirk Jacobs and colleagues, a distinction should be made between seeking an explanation for, on the one hand, the higher level of anti-Semitic and Islamophobic expressions in general since 2000 and, on the other hand, fluctuations in the registered expressions since then (Jacobs et al. 2011). These fluctuations are strongly related to, as will be illustrated, outbursts of violence in the Middle East and acts of violence committed in the name of Islam in the West.

With regard to fluctuations in the development of registered anti-Semitic expressions, the data pinpoint a clear parallel between the increase of these expressions and violent incidents and wars in which Israel has been involved, such as the Second Intifada (2000–2005), the military operation in Lebanon (2006), and the Gaza Wars (2008–2009, 2012, 2014). Every time the Middle East conflict escalated, the number of anti-Semitic incidents peaked and every time a conflict ceased, the number of incidents decreased. There is a clear statistical link between violent events in the Middle East and acts of anti-Semitism in the Netherlands.

Annual reports of the CIDI indicate that the perpetrators of Middle East-related anti-Semitic incidents have, as far as is known, different backgrounds—some are non-Muslim, others are Muslim. An example of incidents perpetrated by Muslims is the pro-Gaza demonstration in The Hague on 24 July 2014, where Muslim youth waving ISIS flags shouted “Death to Israel, death to Jews” (NOS 2014). The research report by Ron van Wonderen and Willem Wagenaar on anti-Semitism among Dutch youth shows that 2% of all Christian and all non-believing youth and 12% of all Muslim youth do not think ‘so positively’ about Jews in the Netherlands (van Wonderen and Wagenaar 2015, 27). Among the youth who do not think ‘so positively’ about Dutch Jews, 7% of the Christian, 13% of the non-believers, and 36% of the Muslims mentioned that this was due to the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians (van Wonderen and Wagenaar 2015, 37).

In relation to upsurges of Islamophobia, violent acts committed in the name of Islam in the West work as catalysts, such as the events of 9/11, the murder of Theo van Gogh (2004), the London bombings (2005), and the bloody attacks in Paris (2015) and Brussels (2014, 2016). These events lead to a strong increase in the number of Islamophobic incidents. It appears that the perpetrators blame Muslims in general for what Muslim extremists have done.

Why have there been more incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia in the Netherlands in general from 2000 onwards and why does the Middle East conflict in particular trigger anti-Semitism and violent attacks in the name of Islam? Interpreted from the perspective of Social Identity Theory, these phenomena are manifestations of the polarisation between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and negative out-group attitudes. According to this theory, this polarisation is strongly promoted by the factor of *perceived (realistic, symbolic or social) threat*. The theory assumes that, if people feel threatened, they tend to close ranks and stigmatise ‘the other’ (cf. Schuyt 2006; Riek, Mania, and Gaertner 2006).

With respect to Islamophobia, the most plausible explanation for the peaks in the registered numbers is simply that the perpetrators of Islamophobic incidents feel threatened by the violent acts of *jihadists* and blame Muslims in general for these acts (cf. D'Haenens and Bink 2007). However, regarding the rise of the general level of Islamophobia in society, realistic threat is probably not the only factor, possibly not even the most prominent factor. In addition to realistic threat, the symbolic and social threat which a section of the native population experiences with regard to Muslims is important. Many Dutch people assume that the alleged core values of Islam and Dutch culture are incompatible, in particular regarding issues such as the relationships between men and women, homosexuality, freedom of expression, and tolerance, and they fear that the perceived original Dutch culture will disappear with the rise of Islam (Peters and Vellenga 2007). Moreover, many Dutch people fear that they are losing the country they feel they belong to, due to the emergence of a particularly large Muslim community.<sup>6</sup> The Dutch historian Piet de Rooy wrote after the killing of Theo van Gogh that

There was a community of about one million people in Dutch society that actually did not fit in and possibly did not even want to fit in. The feeling that the old country had gone widely prevailed. (de Rooy 2005, 11; translated by the author)

Moreover, according to many Dutch, the government does not really acknowledge this problem, let alone challenge it adequately. They have less confidence in the government and talk about politicians in terms of 'careerists' and 'shameless profiteers' who do not stand for the interests of the native Dutch population and who ignore the considerable problems related to immigration and multicultural society (cf. Houtman and Duyvendak 2009).

How does the factor of 'perceived threat' contribute to anti-Semitism among (a section of the) Muslim communities? It is not likely that the group which is the main target of anti-Semitic expressions, namely Dutch Jews, is generally perceived by Muslims as a serious symbolic, social or realistic threat, if only because of its very modest size. Moreover, violent attacks by Jews on Muslims are non-existent in the Netherlands.

Although Muslims do not likely feel threatened by Dutch Jews, many of them still feel disadvantaged in Dutch society; this feeling of threat can also contribute to anti-Semitism. Research indicates that many Muslims feel discriminated against and marginalised in Dutch society and, related to that, they feel that in many situations they are not treated equally to other groups and that double standards are applied (cf. Andriessen, Fernee, and Wittebrood 2014, 77; Gans 2017). Some even believe that the West, including the Netherlands, opposes Islam and seeks to destroy it (cf. Slootman and Tillie 2006). How does this feeling of threat contribute to anti-Semitism?

There are at least two ways in which the perceived deprived position of Muslims in Dutch society likely affects their attitudes to Jews and anti-Semitism. It is known that many Muslims have feelings of solidarity with the Palestinians and thus harbour anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiments. They feel politically and probably religiously ('they are our brothers') connected to the Palestinians and consider Jews, including Dutch Jews, to be complicit in the oppression of the Palestinians by Israel (cf. Klug 2005, 58). These feelings are intensified by the fact that they recognize their own deprived situation in the Palestinian-Israel relations. Therefore, they feel not only particular loyalty to the Palestinians but also particular aversion to Israel and, as a consequence, sometimes aversion to Jews. This point is supported by the research project on anti-Semitism among Dutch Muslim youth, conducted by van Wonderen and Wagenaar, which shows a correlation between them feeling discriminated against and

disadvantaged and thinking 'less positively' about Jews, the state of Israel, and Zionists (van Wonderen and Wagenaar 2015, 51).<sup>7</sup>

The feeling of being threatened may affect the phenomenon of anti-Semitism among Muslims in another way. In the Netherlands, anti-Semitism is highly taboo. While it has certainly never completely disappeared in post-war society, the overwhelming majority of the Dutch population condemns anti-Semitism with great conviction (cf. Gans 2010; Ensel 2014; Ensel and Gans 2017). By expressing anti-Semitic sentiments, the Muslim perpetrators of these expressions attempt to provoke the society they feel at odds with. They know that anti-Semitism is a taboo in the Netherlands, so they can target the Dutch by breaking this taboo. This provocative behaviour is clearly visible in the activities of the Moroccan-Dutch rapper Appa (Maghreb.NL 2015) and the Belgium activist Dyab Abou Jahjah, the founder of the Arabic European League (AEL) (Dyab Abou Jahjah 2017a, b), leader of the Movement X and well-known in the Netherlands, who declared themselves as anti-Semitic in order to challenge the current interpretation of the right of freedom of speech. According to them, it should be forbidden to slander Allah and the Prophet and to insult Muslims and they attempt to demonstrate the supposed double standards regarding the right of freedom of expression by voicing controversial anti-Semitic statements. However, this behaviour is likely more widespread. In the research on anti-Semitism among Dutch youth, van Wonderen and Wagenaar state that Muslim youth in particular who do not think 'so positively' about Jews in the Netherlands have the feeling that "with regard to different forms of discrimination in the Netherlands as well as the Dutch image of the Middle East conflict, double standards are being used" (van Wonderen and Wagenaar 2015, 8).

The factor of threat or fear is crucial. However, what are the forces that influence this factor? As mentioned, Resource Mobilisation Theory outlines that fear or discontent usually does not well up spontaneously in society, but is (partly) the result of mobilisation and framing activities undertaken by *institutions*, *movements*, and the *media*, which have an interest in this. This appears to be the case for Islamophobia. The existing fear of Muslims and Islam among the Dutch population is not only fertile ground for the current anti-Islam movement but, conversely, is also nourished by this movement and especially by its most important representative: the PVV. Just after the turn of the century, the flamboyant politician Pim Fortuyn succeeded in mobilising 'angry citizens' by focusing on their discontent about immigration, multicultural society, and Islam and, after his assassination in 2002, he was succeeded by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and subsequently Geert Wilders. From 2006, Geert Wilders and his PVV party have been fighting continuously against the alleged threat of Islamisation (Peters and Vellenga 2007). They have a direct interest in the continuation of the presence of this sentiment within the Dutch population, as it justifies their existence in politics and is one of the main pillars of their electoral success. This factor does not appear to play a prominent role regarding anti-Semitism. There are no anti-Semitic parties in the Dutch Parliament; indeed, in the Dutch political arena, anti-Semitism is widely rejected.

What is significant with respect to anti-Semitism is the influence of international actors and media. Anti-Semitic sentiments in the Netherlands and other European countries are not only stimulated by the propaganda of radical and extremist Islamic groups, such as Al Qaeda or ISIS, but also by Arabic, Turkish, and North-African broadcasters and Internet forums. They increase feelings among the Muslims in Western countries of being threatened and they portray Israel and Jews constantly and exclusively in negative terms (Webman 2010, 2012; Jikeli 2015, 229–235). They view Israel as an imperialistic state and



the Jews as conspirators striving for world domination. Through satellite dishes and the Internet, this kind of stigmatisation enters the houses of immigrant families who hail from Islamic countries. Research reveals, however, that Muslim youth in the Netherlands orientate themselves not only in relation to these media, but also in relation to a wide range of media sources, significantly more frequently and intensively than non-Muslim youth (Konijn et al. 2010).

## Conclusion

In the Netherlands, the general level of the annual numbers of recorded incidents of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia has increased since 2000 and, at the same time, there have been significant fluctuations in the numbers of notified incidents per year. The fluctuations correlate to outbursts of violence in the Middle East and to acts of violence committed in the name of Islam in the West. The increase of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia relates to real, symbolic, and social threats experienced in the context of Dutch multi-ethnic society, changes in national identity, and trends in globalisation. Because of these trends, regional conflicts like the Israeli–Palestinian conflict have a bigger effect on the relation between population groups in other parts of the world.

Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia should not be considered as completely separate phenomena (cf. Renton and Gidley 2017; Bunzl 2007; Silverstein 2008). Further, they can reinforce each other, creating a downward spiral in which tensions increase, possibly resulting in violence directed at Jews or Muslims or both. Anti-Semitism perpetrated by people with an Islamic background can stimulate aversion to Muslims among Jews and other Dutch citizens; conversely, Islamophobia can contribute to aversion to Dutch society among Muslims in the Netherlands and activate a section of them to protest against this society by expressing anti-Semitic sentiments. This is what Evelien Gans draws attention to when she writes:

Islamophobia and the feeling among Muslims that double standards are applied may tend to provoke more antisemitism, which leads to more Islamophobia—a spiralling movement that is not exclusive to Muslims. (Gans 2017, 524)

## Notes

1. A recent survey conducted by the PEW Research Center shows that the Netherlands is certainly not the only European country which has to deal with anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. The survey provides an overview of antipathy towards Jews and Muslims in six European Union countries: Germany, France, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the United Kingdom. Thirteen per cent of all Europeans studied voiced negative sentiments about Jews. The strongest anti-Semitic sentiment was found in Poland, where 28% of respondents said they had an unfavorable opinion of Jews. The anti-Muslim sentiment was substantially more widespread. One in three of all respondents (33%) holds negative opinions on Muslims. Anti-Muslim views were particularly prevalent among Italians (61%). The lowest percentage of anti-Muslim sentiment was found in the UK (19%). (Stokes 2015, 21–22)
2. The term ‘father-Jews’ refers to the offspring of a Jewish father and a non-Jewish mother. In contrast to the offspring of a Jewish mother and a non-Jewish father, they are not recognized as Jews by Jewish law (*Halacha*).
3. ‘Fortuyn revolt’ refers to the radical change within the Dutch political system under the influence of the meteoric rise of the charismatic figure of Pim Fortuyn in the Dutch political

firmament in the early 2000s. Fortuyn claimed to be the ‘real leader’ of the ‘ordinary people’ and promised to make every effort to defend Dutch sovereignty against the threat of the ‘Islamisation’ of Dutch society. On 6 May 2002, he was assassinated by an animal rights activist. Despite this tragedy, his party decided to pursue its candidacy in the elections nine days later, which proved a great success for the Lijst Pim Fortuyn (LPF). It won 26 of the 150 seats, becoming the second largest party in parliament after the Christian Democrats. Pim Fortuyn and the LPF broke open the Dutch political system and paved the way for so-called ‘populism’ in the Netherlands.

4. This conclusion is confirmed by data recorded by the Dutch police in 2014 and 2015; the police also registered an increase in the number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2015 (Politie 2015, 68). For the most recent information on Islamophobia in the Netherlands, see van der Valk’s report *Monitor Moslim Discriminatie: Derde rapportage* (van der Valk 2017) which confirms the strong increase in Islamophobic incidents in 2015.
5. Research conducted by Ruud Koopmans shows that anti-Semitism is not only over-represented among Muslims in the Netherlands, but also in five other European countries: Germany, France, Belgium, Austria, and Sweden. A survey in these six countries revealed that 9% of native Christians are overtly anti-Semitic and agree that Jews cannot be trusted, whereas 45% of Muslims endorse this opinion. According to Koopmans, anti-Semitism in Europe is, in particular, correlated to the degree of religious fundamentalism. Multivariate regression analysis shows that demographic and socio-economic variables are less important predictors of out-group hostility. (Koopmans 2015).
6. This is confirmed by social psychological research which revealed that prejudice towards Muslims in the Netherlands is predominately influenced by experienced symbolic threat, not by realistic threat (González et al. 2008).
7. The connection made in this explanation between anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiments in certain Muslim circles and Muslims’ experience of having a threatened position in society is supported by the interpretations of Nathalie Debrauwere-Miller and Ethan Katz of Middle East-related anti-Semitic incidents in France perpetrated by Muslims. Debrauwere-Miller states that many young Muslims in France strongly identify with the Palestinians in this conflict, due to that fact that they see the struggle of the Palestinians as a symbol for their own exclusion in France (Debrauwere-Miller 2010, 11). In addition, Ethan Katz argues that many Muslim immigrants and their children face persistent discrimination in French society and continuously struggle to integrate successfully. In particular, since the 1990s, they “have seen the suffering of the Palestinian people not simply as a case of fellow Arabs suffering, but as a powerful metaphor for their own struggles in France. Correspondingly, they regard French Jews’ increasingly visible support for Israel, like these Jews’ greater ‘Frenchness’, as a sign of Jewish identification with the imperialist oppressors of innocent Muslim victims.” (Katz 2015, 320)

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